



Louisiana Office of Public Health
Infectious Disease Epidemiology
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Information on Anthrax

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, which is capable of forming spores.

What are the signs and symptoms of anthrax?

Cutaneous (skin) infection: begins as a raised itchy bump that looks like an insect bite. Within 1-2 days, it develops into a boil-like sore and then a painless ulcer with a characteristic dark area in the center. The infection can also cause swelling of the lymph glands near the area.

Inhalation (lung): People who get anthrax by breathing in spores have symptoms that are like a common cold and usually occur within one week. After several days, the symptoms can progress to severe breathing problems and shock.

Infection by ingestion: Intestinal infections from eating contaminated meat are rare. The infection causes severe swelling of the intestinal tract. The first signs are nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever, followed by stomachaches, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

Can anthrax easily infect someone?

To cause infection in the skin the germ must be rubbed into a cut in the skin. To cause gastrointestinal anthrax the germ must be swallowed. To cause pulmonary anthrax, enough spores (at least 5 thousand spores) must be inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist.

Is anthrax contagious from person to person?

Inhalation anthrax is NOT spread from person to person. Even if someone develops symptoms of inhalation anthrax, they are not contagious to other persons. If someone develops cutaneous anthrax, the drainage from an open sore presents a **low** risk of infection to others. The only way cutaneous anthrax can be transmitted is by **direct** contact with the drainage from an open sore. Anthrax is **not** spread from person to person by casual contact, sharing of office space, or by coughing and sneezing.

What do I do if I think I have been exposed and are having symptoms?

Contact your primary care doctor immediately. He may recommend that you be tested. He may also want to place you on medication.

Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics.

Who can I or my health care provider call if we have questions or concerns?

You and/or your doctor can call the Office of Public Health, Infectious Disease and Bioterrorism Program at 1-800-256-2748.

Where can I get vaccinated against anthrax?

Unfortunately, the anthrax vaccine is only available to those in the military. At this point it is only available to that specific group because of the risk the military may encounter in their work. You may wish to consult the Department of Defense's anthrax vaccine immunization program website.

<http://www.anthrax.osd.mil>

For additional information on bioterrorism:

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>

<http://www.hopkins-biodefense.org>

Adapted from CDC document